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A SYSTEMATIC READING OF *DE LIBERTATE ARBITRII*: THE IDEAS OF FREEDOM AND THE WILL OF SAINT ANSELM

Abstract: The idea of freedom and the will in the influential and important work of Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) is being examined in this paper. Anselm discusses free will in a dialogue (*De libertate arbitrii*) that is the second part of a trilogy that he instructs us to consider as a whole. To understand the ideas of freedom and the will the texts are systematically being analyzed, with particular emphasis on the concepts of rectitude, truth, freedom and the will, the way that free will is given to the rational nature and how human beings are solely responsible for the perseverance of their freedom and will. As the texts are being read, some of the modern dimensions of the concepts under consideration will be simultaneously encountered.

Keywords: Anselm, freedom, will, freedom of choice, freedom to choose, Medieval philosophy, moral philosophy, metaphysics.

Introduction

One of the major issues of philosophy is, without doubt, the question of freedom and the will. Although scholarly discussion of the issue has been extensive, the question remains unanswered and philosophers and thinkers seem to agree that improving the question is a better approach than attempting to answer it.

But, for Anselm and his era, this is not yet a broad and acceptable postulate; at least he can seek answers to major questions as is the case here. Anselm chose to discuss the issue of free will in a dialogue under the title *De libertate arbitrii*, which is the second part of the trilogy: *De veritate*, *De libertate arbitrii*, *De casu Diaboli*. The fact that he chose to discuss those three matters together and, moreover, in dialogue form, is in itself important.

The dialogue form, though it could be easily attributed to a mimesis of platonic dialogues, in this case isn't inspired by Plato, whose texts at the time were not immediately accessible to Anselm. The only platonic text that Anselm might have seen is *Timaeus*, but still it is highly improbable that he had ever read it.[1] On the contrary, what most certainly influenced Anselm was, of course, the work of Saint Augustine,[2] who very early in his writing career produced the *Cassiciacum Dialogues* [*Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita*, *De ordine*]. These have the form of a teacher conversing with his students on matters that have been left unclear during their past studies.[3] Sometimes, the tradition of early medieval dialogues is attributed to Boethius, in whose major work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, we find two persons discussing, one with a leading role and the other assisting the discussion. But that is not the primary influence, at least for Saint Anselm.

The main difference between these kinds of dialogue forms is that in the first case the discussion elaborates arguments discussed by all participants and gradually concludes with the formation of the correct answer on each subject. In the second case, which interests us here, the student/interlocutor dialogue does not have an active part in the formation of the argument. Instead, the teacher offers an accurate analysis of the subject matter and the student/interlocutor learns what the right and/or correct answer is as much as he learns how to approach similar questions for his future inquiries.

So, in the dialogues written by Anselm, the teacher gradually modulates and offers his knowledge to the student while the student poses objections or questions which the teacher responds to in order to slowly lead the student to form the right and correct knowledge. In other cases, the student poses questions that help the teacher elaborate and continue his argumentation. But the student does not provoke his teacher's analysis.[4]

Finally, it is also important to note that besides the trilogy that we already mentioned there is only one more text in dialogue form in Anselm's

[1] G. B. MATTHEWS, Anselm, Augustine, and Platonism, *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, eds. B. DAVIES – B. LEFTOW, Cambridge 2004, 61–83.

[2] See *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. E. STUMP – N. KRETZMANN, Cambridge 2006, 254–266 (M. W. F. STONE).

[3] *Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions*, eds. K. POLLMAN – M. VESSEY, Oxford – New York 2005.

[4] "Anselm explicitly makes of his interlocutor a partner in the dialogue who is supposed to anticipate conclusions and implications and/or who more truly motivates the entire discussion" – E. SWEENEY, Literary Forms of Medieval Philosophy, The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Summer 2013 Edition), ed. E. N. ZALTA, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/medieval-literary/ (cons. Aug. 29, 2013).

work. There is one prior to the trilogy, the *De Grammatico*, which elaborates on the dialectical method. But this is a subject that concerns the literary formation of arguments and thus does not have a purely philosophical content. As Anselm himself notes: "I wrote a forth in the same mode, not without its utility, I think, as an introduction to dialectic, called *De Grammatico*, but since it pertains in a different inquiry than the three just mentioned, I do not number it among them".[5] And there is one more, written many years after this trilogy, the famous *Cur Deus Homo*, where dialogues are inserted into the main analysis and they implicate real persons: Anselm himself and one of his students and friends, Boso, who assumes the role of asking questions from the perspective of a non-Christian.

Thus, only the trilogy we are going to examine uses pure dialogue form with a philosophical subject matter. And though the evoked subjects are purely philosophical (or better, theologico-philosophical),[6] precisely because of its dialogical form, the trilogy belongs both in the literary and the philosophical form. On account of its dialogical form and its literary assumptions, one may be misled into thinking that the subject matter is straightforward and that this form is the opposite of the serious and difficult topics that it discusses; but that is not the case here. For this reason it is important for the reader to keep in mind that Anselm chose the form of dialogue to discuss difficult philosophical issues.

In the "Preface" of *De veritate* [On truth], Anselm explicitly demands and explains that those three texts must be considered as a unity and that they also must be studied together and in the following order: *On Truth*, *On*

[5] ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, Preface of "On truth", in: *The Major Works*, eds. B. DAVIES – G. R. EVANS, Oxford – New York 1998, 151.

[6] The role of faith in medieval thought is a crucial one to be taken in consideration and there is a great ongoing debate on whether we should talk about philosophy in the Medieval Age or only about theology. As Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams note: "Many discussions of the relationship between faith and reason assume some such prima facie incompatibility between religious faith and philosophical reason, though few put the dichotomy in such stark terms. Even authors who wish to make room for both faith and reason in their systems are careful to delineate a distinctive role for each. (…) Anselm does not assume any incompatibility, even a prima facie one, between faith and reason; nor does he assign a distinctive role to each. (…) Anselm holds that the doctrines of the Christian faith are intrinsically rational because they concern the nature and activity of God, who is himself supreme reason and exemplifies supreme wisdom in everything that he does" (S. VISSER – T. WILLIAMS, *Anselm*, Oxford – New York 2009, 13–14). For the debate on the existence of philosophy in the Medieval Age see, among others, J. A. AERTSEN, Gibt es eine mittelalteriche Philosophie?, *Philosophie und geistiges Erbe des Millelalters*, Köln 1994, 13–30; C. G. STEEL, La philosophie médiévale comme expression de son époque, *Actualité de la pensée médiévale*, La-Neuve 1994, 79–93.

Free Will, *The Fall of the Devil*.[7] So, in our systematic inquiry on the understanding of the idea of freedom and the will in Anselm's trilogy we are going to examine only specific and directly relevant arguments and notions.

First step: that Truth is rectitude and rectitude is nothing other than correctness

In the first dialogue, *On truth*, the problem is presented by the student who asks his teacher to explain a passage from the *Monologion*, Anselm's first work, and to give him an explicit definition of truth. Anselm declares that he has never encountered such a definition and that they can begin their quest by examining all the things in which truth is said to exist. So Anselm begins to look for the truth in sentences and propositions, in utterances, in opinion and thoughts, in the will, in actions, activities, and deeds, in the senses (inner and external), in things, and in their essence. From the very beginning it becomes clear that the concept that is central for the development of the argumentation and the understanding of truth is the notion of rectitude (*rectitudo*).

Anselm is highly analytical in his presentation, almost to the point of being similar to contemporary forms of analytical writing,[8] and does not leave even a single word unclear either in regard to its content or its place in the course of the reasoning. In the second chapter of the text, he defines rectitude as the truth: "So it is the same thing for it [for the affirmation] to be correct and to be true […], for it [the affirmation] truth is no different from rectitude".[9] This affirmation is going to be repeated in the next chapters, as truth, correctness and rectitude seem to converge. Rectitude signifies what ought to be, or what ought to be done, or what ought to be willed, and so on. Rectitude coincides with truth when what ought to be is, or what ought to be done is done etc. So, the first understanding of rectitude involves the idea that truth corresponds to and/or describes reality.

The second understanding of rectitude involves the idea that truth is to be found in the fulfilment of the norms of reason, of discourse (*oratio*). Rectitude can be found in a well-formed sentence even though its content

[7] See n. 5. A very brief account of the argument on free will can be found in T. WILLIAMS, Saint Anselm, *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (September 2007), http://plato.stanford.edu /entries/anselm/ (cons. March 11, 2013). An important demonstration of Anselm's conception of freedom, to which I owe my first contact with this particular topic, can be found in S. VISSER – T. WILLIAMS, Anselm's Account of Freedom, *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, 179–203.

[8] S. G. KANE, Anselm's Definition of Freedom, *Religious Studies* 7/3 (1973) 297–306, pp. 297, 298.

[9] ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *The Major Works*, 154.

might not be true. But we also have rectitude in the formation of the sentence, though not necessarily in what the sentence signifies. In other words, something can have rectitude in a given, stable and immutable situation, where what is is or what is not is not, though depending on its characteristics it can be said to be correct, and have a *natural* correctness. At the same moment, the subject matter of the same thing might be changing and thus, its rectitude is accidental and according to its use.

We have already gathered some important elements for what constitutes rectitude, truth and correctness. On the one hand, natural rectitude can be attributed to such things as sentences, senses, things but it will always be accidental and it will depend on how and when it is used. On the other hand, there are, for instance, necessarily true statements etc. that are always true regardless of the circumstances and those always have rectitude. What we have here is the differentiation of necessary and contingent truth. Rectitude can be either on the form, or the content, or both, but has nothing to do with the agent, or the interior sense, for in this case, the simple expression of a proposition, for example, would fulfil its end, regardless of its truthfulness or falsity. So something is true, correct and has rectitude when it satisfies two conditions: it must correspond to reality and it must do so because that is what it ought to do, because that is why it has been created.

This last parameter serves to underline a crucial point. It is clear that Anselm uses the idea of rectitude in a purely teleological sense: even propositions are true only when they fulfil the end for which they have been created ("fashioned for this purpose"), when they do (*facere*) what they ought to do, and that is why they have been made.[10] We must also point out that so far truth consists of rectitude and coincides with it. Likewise, it is important that truth "is rectitude perceptible by mind alone",[11] that is only through the exercise of reason, and without the contribution of the senses.

[10] "Hence, the truth (or rightness) of statements, on his view, is nothing but their standing in an appropriate relation to the Form or standard of Truth, which is God Himself!" says Jeffrey E. Brower in awe. He has previously noted that teleological theories of the Middle Ages, during Anselm's time, "require agents to aim at their own individual happiness or well-being" and "this is taken to include the good of others and to involve the possession of the moral and intellectual virtues". But as we are going to encounter further on, in regard of Anselm's ethical theory, it also involves deontological characteristics, and thus, "it succeeds in combining elements of [both] theories". See J. E. BROWER, Anselm on Ethics, *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, 222–256, pp. 222–223, 234–239.

[11] ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *The Major Works*, 166.

Second step: what the Will consists of

The concept of the will is introduced and gradually analysed in the first text. There are five chapters in which the will is addressed in one way or another, which means that almost half of the entire text refers to this particular concept. This is precisely because the will has a crucial and central role in the understanding of rectitude. Most importantly here, the will appears as a constitutive and necessary element for both dimensions of truth. In the course of this step we are also going to make clear the role of the will in relation to action.

But first things first. After the discussion on the truth in propositions and the truth of opinion (and thought – chapters 2 and 3), Anselm briefly refers to the truth of the will (chapter 4). The Teacher cites a theological argument derived from the Bible and declares that "truth is in the will".[12] There, we have the first reference to the devil: with the wrong application of his will abandoned the truth. The devil willed what he ought not will and there is no rectitude in that attitude; on the contrary, that is how he sinned. The will is given by God so as to will what ought to be willed and thus to stand in truth. If will wills what ought not to be willed, rectitude is deserted and so is truth, even God.

This is a very short reference to the will that only wishes to apply the rule of rectitude, correctness and truth to will, through the use of the example of the fall of the devil. It is a small introduction to a vast philosophical issue at least during the Middle Ages.

But, of course, that is just the starting point for the examination of the will by Anselm. In the very next chapter ("On the truth of natural and non-natural action"), we return to the Scriptures in order to establish that this can also apply to our own actions. The will is given to us by God so as that we may will what we ought to. Those who act badly, "who do evil", do not stand in truth and abandon rectitude and those who act well, "who do truth", stand in truth and have rectitude. But that does not lead directly to the conclusion that "the truth of action is rectitude".

We mentioned above that there is a distinction between necessary and contingent truths and now we must apply this rule. Natural activities (a fire producing heat, to use Anselm's example) necessarily do what they ought to and therefore stand in truth. That cannot be said as easily for human actions where one could act in a good or bad way without necessarily willing to act in this particular way. Alternatively, he may have found himself in a situation in which he endures the consequences of something

[12] Ibidem, 156.

else and in that sense he does not do, he does not will what happens to him, he does not act willingly. Thus, the idea of correct will is introduced and an action has rectitude when correct will motivates it, which is when one acts willingly as one ought to.[13]

The idea that when someone endures the consequences of something else and how this does not signify rectitude even if he does what he ought to, is analysed more systematically in chapter 8 ("On the different concepts of 'ought' and 'ought not' and 'can' and 'cannot'"). In the words of the Teacher: "Therefore it can happen that an action or passion ought to be according to nature which ought not to be with respect to the agent or the one acted upon, since the former ought not to act and the latter ought not to suffer it. […] So you see that it can very often come about that the same action both ought and ought not to be under different conditions".[14] Clearly, when it comes to human actions, the comprehension of the rectitude in actions must be based on a close and careful examination of both the capacity to will correctly and the capacity to act according to the correct will.

In the next chapter ("That every action signifies the true or false"), the interlocutors conclude that, as far as the judgement of human beings is concerned, truthfulness lies more clearly in deeds than in words, and that consequently, as far as things are concerned, truth and rectitude lie in the mere existence of things.

With all this in the background, we are now led to the definition of justice in the twelfth chapter. Justice is the same thing as rectitude so long as we speak about people acting willingly as they ought to, and thus belongs only to rational nature.[15] So justice is rectitude of the will, and has rectitude when someone knowingly and correctly wills what he ought to will. Then he is praiseworthy and just. Of course, praiseworthy and just is

[13] Anselm "defines freedom of the will specifically in terms of will and not in terms of action. Many people both before and after Anselm have claimed freedom of the will is the power to *do* things rather than a power to *will* things. Boethius, for instance, (…) maintains free will is the power to act or not to act" – T. EKENBERG, Free Will and Free Action in Anselm of Canterbury, *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 22/4 (2005) 301–318, p. 310.

[14] ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *The Major Works*, 162.

[15] An example used here by Anselm to explain this point brings to mind Kant's famous example in which he discusses whether one must say the truth to the murderer who asks where the person he persecutes is. This is going to become clear a little later, when Anselm discusses the act of lying. Here, Anselm presents a case in which someone unknowingly locks the murderer outside the house in which the persecuted person is staying. For the "lie or die" example of Anselm see T. EKENBERG, Free Will and Free Action, 303–306.

the will that wills what it ought to when it is not forced or externally influenced by any threat or reward etc.[16]

New elements are now added to the notion of the will as Anselm explains: "every will wills both something and for the sake of something. […] Accordingly every will has a what and a why".[17] For the examination of justice both "what and why" are necessary if we are to follow the rectitude rule and therefore "will what it ought and for the reason it ought to"; and thus, we conclude with the definition of justice: "Justice is rectitude of will preserved for its own sake".[18]

To sum up, Anselm maintains that the truth of the will, which is identified with its rectitude, is accomplished when the will wills what it ought to will. The will is given by God and the right and correct exercise of the will is why it was given. So the will must accomplish its end which is to be applied correctly. As justice is rectitude of the will preserved for its own sake, an action is just when the answer to the "what and why" corresponds to the rectitude of the will. In other words, "it is both necessary and sufficient for justice, and thus for praiseworthiness, that an agent will what is right, knowing it to be right, because he knows it is right";[19] otherwise, the agent who acts understands the rectitude of his own actions and wants to act in this way exactly because of his actions rectitude.

Here it is important to stress that rectitude of the will can be perceptible only by the mind and that it addresses only to rational nature. Thus, will is connected to justice and apart of its deontological character – which we examined above – acquires, inevitably, a moral dimension; particularly when it is not the result of any kind of coercion or external interference and is exercised for its own sake. The concepts of the will, truth, justice and rectitude are interwoven and complement each other: "He who knows

[16] One can find a striking parallel to this in a passage from the Aristotelian *Nichomacheian Ethics* were Aristotle claims: "The sort of things each person says and does (λέγει και πράττει), and thus how he lives, are determined by the sort of person he is – if he is not acting for the sake of some goal. In itself, what is false is base and blameworthy, whereas what is true is noble and praiseworthy. […] Yet let us […] first speak about the truthful person. Now, we are speaking not about truthfulness in the case of agreements or anything that extends into the realm of injustice or justice (for this would belong to another virtue). Rather, in the situations in which nothing of that sort is involved, the person we are speaking of is truthful both in speech and in life (εν λόγω και εν βίω) because such is his characteristic (τω την έξιν τοιούτος είναι)" – ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. R. C. BARTLETT – S. COLLIN, Chicago – London 2011, $1127a_{26}$–$1127b_{3}$.

[17] ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *The Major Works*, 168.

[18] Ibidem, 169.

[19] Ibidem, 181.

one of them knows the others and can from the known go to the knowledge of the unknown. Indeed he who knows one cannot be in ignorance of the others".[20]

Third step: Freedom and the Will

When Anselm refers directly to free will, his first step is to distinguish it from the power to sin and from sin in itself. In so doing, he is responding indirectly to a commonly accepted definition of Augustinian origin whereby freedom entails the power both to sin and not to sin.[21] Anselm's aim now is to find a definition of freedom and free will that can be applied to every being, in every rational nature. The question is to understand what kind of genre freedom is and the particular parts it may contain. So far it is certain that "to sin does not belong in the definition of free will […] the power to sin is neither freedom nor a part of freedom".[22] This is how Anselm begins his inquiry for a novel understanding of freedom and free will.

Anselm's reasoning in what follows is very analytical and complex, and we will attempt to understand why he proceeds in this way and how he arrives at an original definition of freedom and free will on the basis of the previous analysis. The first inversion is that we must understand freedom in contrast to sin and free will in contrast to the power to sin. It is important that sin is entirely distinct from freedom and that sin is not included in freedom. This is important because in the next chapter ("Both the angel and man sinned by this capacity to sin and by free will and, though they could have become slaves to sin, sin did not have the power to dominate them"), we find the claim – as we shall explain – that free will is opposite to necessity and so people are responsible for their choices and their actions. Similarly, even if they sin it is through their own free will, that is to say, solely by their own judgement. Our will and judgement are free and that cannot be said for the power to sin.

As we have already seen, the will was given to the rational nature by God. Even if we sin we do not lose the will, because the will is the preservation of rectitude of the will for its own sake and rectitude cannot be lost, at least "as long as [one] willed what [he/she] ought".[23] Freedom and free judgment are capacities given to the rational nature and if they vanish, after

[20] Ibidem, 166.

[21] A more extensive analysis of this point can be found, among others, in S. G. KANE, Anselm's Definition of Freedom, 299, and K. A. ROGERS, *Anselm on Freedom*, New York 2008, 87–107.

[22] ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *The Major Works*, 176.

[23] Ibidem, 178.

sinning, "the rational nature still has undiminished what is proper to it",[24] since a capacity might be absent, might operate defectively, but it cannot be eliminated. In the third chapter ("How free will is had after they have made themselves slaves of sin and what free will is") we encounter the definition of freedom and free will: "since all freedom is a capacity, the liberty of will is the capacity for preserving rectitude of the will for the sake of rectitude itself", an argument which is followed by the definition of free judgement: "free judgement is nothing other than a judgement capable of preserving the rectitude of will for the sake of rectitude itself".[25]

Given that freedom and free will are capacities, it is now clear that reason and the will are necessary and sufficient conditions for freedom and free will to exist in the agent. Otherwise, freedom and free will consist in the combined presence of reason and the will.

Now that Anselm has defined the general terms for what is freedom and free will, in the next three chapters ("That no temptation forces one to sin unwillingly", "How our will although it seems powerless, is powerful against temptations", "How it is stronger than temptation even when it succumbs to it") he begins the deontological and moral development of freedom and free will.

To start with, Anselm reminds the reader that no one can be deprived of freedom or free will except by his own will and "every willing person wills his own willing".[26] We can take this assertion as a claim to the effect that one is responsible for his/her choices and actions. Even when we decide to act in a way that we should not or even when we are faced with situations where we are forced to choose to do something that does not preserve the rectitude of the will, it is not necessity or determinism that guide our decisions, but our free will. Also, faced with a difficult decision and exactly because of the difficulty of taking it, or because it is hard for us to act in a certain way, we may say that it is necessity or determinism that guides our willing. But that is not true and is merely a way of trying to avoid the difficulty we are faced with.

The example that Anselm uses here to demonstrate this perspective is of someone who faces murder unless he lies. So he must either choose to lie, and thus do not preserve truth, or to tell the truth, and die. It is impossible to both tell the truth and preserve his life so he must unwillingly decide between the two horns of this imposed dilemma. But even if his decision is made unwillingly, it is not against his will because he willingly

[24] Ibidem, 180.
[25] Ibidem, 179.
[26] Ibidem, 181.

decides either to preserve truth or not. "Neither of these is determinately necessary, because both are in his power".[27]

Necessity and determinism may be found in nature, but not in the rational nature where reason and the will exist. As long as human beings preserve rectitude of will, i.e. freedom, and will for its own sake, they cannot depart from rectitude by any other force than their own will, unless they consent to another force, passion, pressure or weakness, as there is no force stronger than the free will. And even if they succumb, freedom of will and freedom are not destroyed.

There is a crucial distinction in the definition of the will according to which it seems that the will both refers to the capacity of willing, the freedom to choose, and also focuses on different things, our freedom of choice. Freedom and freedom to chose "is always in the soul even when it does not will something";[28] it exists in the agent, it remains the same and "has an inalienable strength that cannot be overcome by any other force".[29] This is the conclusion at the end of the three chapters we examined as a single unity.

Anselm continues with the elaboration of some thoughts concerning the divine origin of the will and how this influences the existence of the will. God gave free will to the rational nature and cannot take it away as he cannot separate rectitude from the will. The will preserves its rectitude because that is why and how God gave it to people and the angels; and the will is also just, which means that it does what it ought, because God wants it to be that way. Even when one abandons rectitude of the will, it is nothing else but his/her doing, as we saw, and God does not impede this decision. If one chooses to do as he/she ought not, and thus sins, and acts against rectitude of the will, the capacity of free will is not lost, and can only be restored through the help of the one who gave it to the rational nature, that is through God and heavenly grace.

This means that the right and correct way to choose to act and to will is justified and founded in the existence of the Supreme Being. That is, generally speaking, morality seems to be based on the existence of God. Even if one is free to do whatever he/she likes, that which is right and correct is in principle determined by the will of God.[30]

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[27] Ibidem, 182.

[28] Ibidem, 185.

[29] Ibidem, 186.

[30] This is a rough argument. However, there is a more thorough analysis in J. E. BROWER, Anselm on Ethics, 239–243, where the author clarifies: "In the case of the will, however, things are more complicated. Here we must distinguish one species of rightness (namely, justice) from goodness. And the reason is that, unlike all other things, the will's distinctive nature directs it toward an end beyond itself, namely, supreme god or justice" (Ibidem, 242).

The following chapter is of particular interest (chapter 12: "Why a man who does not have rectitude is called free because if he had it no one could take it away from him, and yet when he has rectitude he is not called a slave because if he loses it he cannot regain it by himself"). Here the Student asks the Teacher why we are not considered slaves of our rectitude. He says that he does not understand why one is called free when no one can deprive him by his rectitude except himself, but one is not called slave, when he cannot restore or regain his will after he sins. This is a provocative idea because it seems to suggest that one is slave of ones's own free will.

Anselm's answer, as we have already noted, is that having the power to sin but choosing not to do so, always makes one free. But he then puts forward a somewhat complicated metaphor: "this is as if you were to ask why a man when the sun is absent is said to have the power to see the sun because he can see it when it is present and when the sun is present is said to be powerless to see the sun because when it is absent he cannot make it present".[31] So rectitude, even if absent, exists in the agent – as it is a capacity and cannot be taken away – as does rectitude of will, that is, freedom. If one cannot restore his own rectitude that doesn't mean that rectitude does not exist in him. One is free because he has rectitude and no one can take his rectitude away; so one is always free even when rectitude is absent. This is an argument that was presented earlier but it does not fully respond to the extravagant provocation implicit in the Student's question.

We are now approaching the end of the second text, as Anselm clarifies the earlier definition given by explaining in the most analytical way each component of the definition (what signifies "of preserving", "rectitude", "will", and "for the sake of rectitude itself"). Thus we have come to a conclusion on freedom as a genus, on what is free will is, and on the varieties of the will. Ultimately, in the final chapter ("The division of this freedom"), Anselm relates the variants of the general definition of freedom to each rational nature (the free will of God, of angels and of men).

In this section we saw that free will is not related to sin, that it is not guided by necessity or determinism, that it consists of reason and the will that are given only to the rational nature. Freedom and free judgement are capacities given to man and the angels by God and cannot be deprived from him, not even by God, who does not interfere with the exercise of freedom but nevertheless can intervene, through Grace, to restore rectitude. God is the criterion of right and wrong and his will should guide man's actions and wills. At all times and in all circumstances, one is responsible for one's actions and choices and cannot be forced unwillingly by anything or anyone to act against his will. The preservation of man's rectitude of will, that is

[31] ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *The Major Works*, 190.

his freedom, can be achieved if one does as he ought, as God willed when he offered to the rational nature the power of freedom and the capacity of the will.

Fourth step: in the realm of angels

Having arrived at the definition of freedom and the free will, and after specifying all the necessary terms and conditions of the definition, also after the classification of the different existing forms of freedom, Anselm, in the third and most extensive text (*On the Fall of the Devil – De casu Diaboli*), shuffles slightly his approach. Overall, the subject of research, that is freedom and free will, remains the same. But now Anselm turns from the inquiry of a definition and the elucidation of the particulars to the examination of the notions themselves and their ontological consequences.

The text provides profound insights on how the rational nature acquires those capacities, on why the will is not related to sin and what this signifies, on the relation of the will with evil and injustice, to mention just a few of the subjects raised. We are also able to follow Anselm's reasoning on the relation of freedom and free will with necessity, alternative choices, determinism or divine foreknowledge. The first question that arises, however, is why Anselm now shifts his attention specifically to the realm of angels as he continues his research.

One answer may be found in the text itself, when the Student clarifies a logical contradiction concerning the possibility of the angel's foreknowledge by using a direct analogy with the situation of man. Clearly, this becomes an opportunity for Anselm to indicate that "It is not the same with man and the angel". Human nature carries the original sin, whereas the angel "without the preceding sin, merited the suffering of some evil".[32] Here it is very important to remember that, as we have already seen, Anselm dissociates freedom and sin, in contrast to Augustine's established and more common definition. And so, it becomes crucial to insist on and to explain every aspect of this dissociation. Thus, by examining freedom and the will in the context of the angels he approaches the pure and spontaneous manifestation of those capacities without the feebleness of the human nature, which needs the grace of God from the very beginning of its existence.[33] In

[32] Ibidem, 225.

[33] As Katherin Rogers puts it, Anselm "sets himself the difficult task of trying to explain, to some extent, how and why a creature made perfectly good would choose evil" – see K. A. ROGERS, *Anselm on Freedom*, 88. But, actually, we must also take into account that Anselm considers as a crucial argument that since the fall of Adam and Eve every human being originally does not possess justice. See the analysis of "The Nature and Transmission of Original Sin" in S. VISSER – T. WILLIAMS, *Anselm*, 242–246.

short, I think that it is the absolute distinction between freedom and sin that drives Anselm to mainly focus, in this part, on the angels.

The subject matter of this text remains the same: to fully understand the place of freedom and the will but in a more theologico-philosophical way. The first major issue is the good created and offered by God and its connection with what is called evil. The question is how the good nature was initially driven to sin. The answer involves the free will that spontaneously wills what it ought not to will. It is imperative that the angel was free to sin, that is, to choose what it ought not to, because justice is served freely, not out of necessity. Then comes the explanation that a bad will (that wills what it ought not) is not in itself evil. Rather, what is evil is the injustice.

This is the starting point of the negative assessment of the concepts that falsely intervene in our understanding of freedom and the capacity of free will. Injustice and evil, the two broader notions in this category are defined as the privation, the absence, the lack of justice and good respectively. So injustice and evil are nothing and are non-beings, they do not have any substance, they do not exist in reality. It becomes once again necessary to elucidate the relation between words and reality, or real existence.

So evil and injustice are nothing by themselves.[34] However, as Anselm explains later on, injustice is not the same as being unjust, and the absence of justice is not the same as not having justice; consequently, evil is not the same as being evil, and the absence of good is not the same as not preserving rectitude for its own sake. To make this distinction, we are first reminded about the two kinds of good and evil, that is the moral aspect and the sensory, the useful/harmful approach. We are then in a position to understand that the being that does not preserve the rectitude for its own sake, and thus sins, or in other words does evil or injustice, is evil and unjust in itself; it does not create something evil (that would be impossible), but becomes evil.

[34] The analysis of something and nothing is a quite special moment of Anselm's analysis. As Visser and Williams (*Anselm*, 35) note: "Anselm believes that the Aristotelian-Boethian account of signification has the resources to accommodate private, indefinite names by arguing, in effect, that a sign can establish an understanding – and thus, according to the Boethian definition, signify – even though it does not establish an understanding of anything. To put the point in more contemporary language, some words convey informational content even though they do not refer to any actual or possible object". The particular subject is not an immediate influence on our investigation and so it is sufficient to note, for whoever might be interested, that the most thorough analysis of the "something–nothing" distinction in Anselm is found in this exact text that we are currently examining.

But how are all these related to our effort to understand Anselm's thought about freedom and the will? This analysis helps us clarify that the will of the rational nature does not succumb to anything or anyone else, as it is "subject to no one"; that the capacity of the will has many instances, among those concupiscence and desire. We also learn that the capacity of will is given to the rational nature by God but is inactive since all movement has been initiated by God.

There are, therefore, two kinds of good and evil – the first is moral good or evil; the other, at a more basic level, is the good that can be called useful and the evil that can be called harmful. It follows that "the will that wills either the more or the less useful is the work and gift of God, as are life and being endowed with senses"[35] and does not involve morality. So justice is the necessary condition for the will to be free from any necessitation and thus the will of the rational nature is governed by justice.

It is almost impossible to examine the third text of this trilogy in detail in the limited space of this article. But what should be stressed at this point of our inquiry on freedom and the will in the third text of Anselm's work is that the central axes of this analysis denote all the key assumptions of the philosopher: he repeats his rejection of any kind of necessity because necessity is contrasted with free choice and freedom of the will. We also need to underline his libertarian approach,[36] which is linked to the absolute moral responsibility of the agent who acts willingly, that is without being subjected to any *external* constraint or force. This, in turn, is connected to the existence of multiple alternative choices, which is not biased even by God's possible prediction of the future.

Final remarks

According to Karl Löwith "An adequate approach to history and its interpretations is necessarily regressive for the very reason that history is moving forward, leaving behind the historical foundations of the more recent and contemporary elaborations. The historical consciousness cannot but start with itself, though its aim is to know the thought of other times and of other men, different from our times and ourselves. History has time and again to be recovered and rediscovered by the living generations. We understand – and misunderstand – ancient authors, but always in the light

[35] ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *The Major Works*, 216.

[36] As Rogers calls Anselm's effort to lay the foundations of the absolute freedom of the rational nature to choose, to will and to act, even in willing to be like God (the origin of the sin of the angel who was initially purely good). See K. A. Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, passim.

of contemporary thought, reading the book of history from the last to the first page. This inversion of the customary way of historical presentation is actually practiced even by those who proceed from past ages to modern times, without being conscious of their contemporary motivations."[37] With that in mind, we began this inquiry in order to understand the idea of freedom and the will as it is presented in Anselm's *De libertate arbitrii*.

We followed the thread of ideas of the first text of the trilogy, *On Truth*, where we came across the idea of rectitude. Here, it becomes clear that Anselm's notion of truth is somehow broader compared to the concept of truth in later stages of the history of philosophy, as it also signifies correctness, right, rightness. In Anselm's words, truth refers to "the preservation of rectitude for its own sake" and is significantly more encompassing than how we understand the notion today.

Gradually, as our systematic reading progressed, we came to understand that this proposition ("the preservation of rectitude for its own sake") functions as a predicate that is added to every attempt to define the genus of the notions we examined: truth, justice, the will, freedom, freedom of choice, and freedom to choose.

As our study advanced, we passed from the general approach of the definitions to a more specific analysis of the content of those concepts. And thus, we came to see justice and free will in the light of moral philosophy. From this perspective, Anselm clearly suggests – and that we could even understand in a way that is also recognizable from a contemporary perspective – that we are solely responsible for our choices and actions, that we are praiseworthy when we do as we ought to, untouched by external pressures or the wrong motives.[38]

There is a temptation to compare some of the text's conceptual highlights with similar ideas at a greater temporal proximity: sometimes while reading through the text one gets the feeling that there is something familiar and contemporary in Anselm's words both in form and content. But despite "the light of contemporary thought" that guides us, we must keep in sight the era in which the texts were written. We hope that we have succeeded in providing an outline of their originality and radicalism. One can clearly see and even admire the teleological certainty that runs throughout

[37] K. LÖWITH, *Meaning in History*, Chicago 1949, 2–3.

[38] There is an interesting part in S. NASH-MARSHALL, Free Will, Evil, and Saint Anselm, *The Saint Anselm Journal* 5/2 (2008) 24–46, pp. 34–37, where the author mentions two possible categories of modern objections concerning alternative possibilities and the relation of freedom with morality. There is also an interesting analysis about the similarities of Anselm's and Descartes' account of free will in S. BERMAN, Human Free Will in Anselm and Descartes, *The Saint Anselm Journal* 2/1 (2004) 1–9.

the entire analysis, a world where everything exists to fulfil its end. There is every reason to try to understand better why Anselm insists so much on the analysis of sin and the importance of its distinctness from free will. We hope to have done justice to these important texts and to have stimulated the interest of the reader to continue the study of Anselm, which we believe opens new possibilities for the concepts we examined here.

Магдалини Цеврени

СИСТЕМАТСКО ЧИТАЊЕ СПИСА *DE LIBERTATE ARBITRII*: ИДЕЈЕ СВЕТОГ АНСЕЛМА О СЛОБОДИ И ВОЉИ

Резиме

Историјска свест не може а да не почне сама собом, иако је њен циљ спознаја мисли других времена и других људи, различитих од наше епохе и нас самих. Људске генерације морају периодично да реконструишу и изнова откривају историју. Ми разумемо, или бар тако мислимо, старе ауторе, али увек у светлу савремене мисли, читајући књигу повеснице од последње ка првој страници. Овакву инверзију уобичајеног начина историјског казивања практикују, заправо, чак и они који се крећу од прошлости ка модерним временима, не бивајући свесни савремености својих побуда. С тим на уму, отпочето је ово истраживање како би се појмила идеја о слободи и вољи, онако како ју је изложио свети Анселм. Праћењем тока идеја у првом тексту трилогије, „О истини“, наишло се на замисао о исправности. Овде постаје јасно да је Анселмов појам истине понешто шири у односу на концепт истине у каснијим фазама развитка филозофије, будући да она, такође, означава и добро, правилност и праведност. Према Анселмовим речима, истина се односи на „очување исправности ради ње саме“, те обухвата много више од онога како се данас разуме тај појам. Како систематско читање постепено напредује, схвата се да постулат о „очувању исправности“ функционише као предикат који се додаје приликом сваког дефинисања испитиваних појмова (истина, правда, воља, слобода, слобода избора). Прелазом од општег ка појединачном, правда и слободна воља сагледавају се у светлу моралне филозофије. Анселм јасно сугерише, на начин препознатљив и из савремене перспективе, да су људи искључиво одговорни за своје изборе и поступке, те да је чинити добро, али не због спољних притисака или погрешних мотива, сваке хвале вредно. Постоји искушење да се неки од концептуалних врхунаца Анселмовог текста

упореде са сличним идејама из епоха ближих данашњем читаоцу: понекад се чини да у Анселмовим речима, како у форми тако и садржају, постоји нешто познато и савремено. Али, упркос „светлу савремене мисли“ које нас води, треба обратити пажњу на време у којем су списи настали. Дивљење изазива телеолошка сигурност присутна током читаве Анселмове анализе – то је универзум у коме све постоји да испуни свој циљ. Нема разлога не покушати да се разуме зашто Анселм толико истрајава на анализи греха и значају његовог раздвајања од слободне воље. У сваком случају, наставак проучавања ових важних списа вероватно би отворио нове могућности за концепте испитиване у овом раду.

Кључне речи: Анселм, слобода, воља, слобода избора, слободан избор, средњовековна филозофија, морална филозофија, метафизика.

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